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## ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY WORK TO THE INDIVIDUAL

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Someone has remarked, perhaps facetiously, that the great educational ambition of the French is to produce so perfect a system that every child in France shall be answering the same question in the same manner at the same moment. For a long time the tendency in American administration of schools was in a similar direction. In zeal for developing a perfect *system*, the true meaning of the word was perverted. A system should represent a connected view of all the truths or principles of the department of knowledge or action under consideration. Frequently it has meant uniformity, not unity; identity rather than symmetry; a narrowed view, not a connected view. In the attempt to evolve a great system, the individual was lost sight of, and boys and girls were treated as though they existed for the schools, not the schools for them.

There was once a teacher whose school was inanely orderly, whose pupils recited according to a set method, standing in a prescribed position, and, when not engaged in some restrictive exercise, sat, as the superintendent expressed it, "like so many darning-needles stuck in a board." There were only girls in the room, and they were arranged upon a definite plan. In the middle row they occupied the exact middle of the seat. Those in the rows at the right sat at the extreme right in their seats; those at the left, at the extreme left. In those days it was the fashion to wear the hair parted, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the partings on those little heads made straight lines down those seven prim rows. That school was like a set of jointed dolls, and the work as wooden and mechanical as the appearance of the pupils.

To be sure, this was an extreme case, but the same spirit prevailed elsewhere, and in the desire to have an orderly school, to have things done uniformly, and to produce quiet, even though it were the quiet

of stagnation, the individual was lost sight of in crowding him into the particular niche which the system said he must fill.

Then the pendulum swung the other way. The kindergarten is doubtless more than anything else responsible for the change. It taught the rights of the individual and the desirability of allowing each child to grow and develop according to his own peculiar characteristics in a natural, unconscious way. The attempt by the untrained to put this idea into practice has resulted in the absolute perversion of the entire theory. Development came to mean unrestrained and undirected action; the will of the child was allowed to lead; he must be entertained and amused, and his desires must never be thwarted.

The principal of one of the Detroit schools, in passing the kindergarten room, heard the screaming of a child. She went in to investigate, and found that a little boy had asked for something, and the teacher, in responding to his request, had not done exactly as he wished. He had worked out a philosophy of life for himself, and had learned that, when he wanted a particular thing, the best way to get it was to lie down on the floor and kick and scream until it was surrendered to him. In the present case he was simply applying the remedy. The principal asked him to go to her room; but words were of no avail, so she gathered him up by such parts of his clothing as came readily to hand and carried him to the office. Her method of dealing with him has not been made public, but they came to an understanding, and in the friendly talk that followed, the child remarked: "We have awful times at home. They don't know what to do with me when I want things." A few days later the mother of the child went to visit the school. On the way the little boy said to her: "If the principal asks you to go to the office, mother, you better go right along and not make any fuss about it."

This, too, is an extreme case. Between these two extremes lies the happy medium, and the thinking educational world is out upon a hunt for it.

The purely intellectual side presents several problems. Those who are preparing for college practically establish the intellectual standards of a school, and the schools, in turn, adopt the compulsory demands of the colleges. All who have had anything to do with

administrative work know that each college sets the pace according to its own particular conditions. In trying to meet these requirements, and at the same time offer the best possible advantages to those who are not going to college, schools have tried all sorts of experiments. They have had a uniform course of study; they have had various courses, some with much of foreign language, some with little, and some with none at all. Then they have tried to work without a defined course, with unlimited electives which allow a student to take almost anything with a hop, skip, and jump from arithmetic to physics, Latin, chemistry, etc., as impulse directs; and the last state of those schools has been worse than the first. This has been called allowing the individual to develop naturally, forgetting that the order of nature is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

The leaders in matters educational have for some time been seeking agreement upon college-entrance requirements. At first glance this may seem like a return to the method of cutting out all candidates upon the same pattern, but it is really a definite and rational move in the opposite direction. A carefully considered scheme of unit requirements will demand uniform training along certain lines, allowing at the same time scope for individual choice in others. It should make less demand for information, more for training. It will make it possible to train students in the spirit of the classics, to a feeling for the magnificent sweep of the lines of the great poets, without their being able, perhaps, to discuss the exact difference between the *cæsura* of Homer and of Vergil.

We often hear the expression: "School is a preparation for life." School is a part of life, a real and important part, and we have no more right to assume that a young person begins to live only when he leaves school than that the life of a plant begins when it bursts into bloom. A high-school girl once said: "I used to feel that I wanted to get through school each day just as soon as I could, so as to do things outside. Somehow school seemed to be a duty that had to be got out of the way before I could begin to live my own life. But now I just live as much here as at home." This feeling should be universal.

If this be the right position, then the responsibility of the school

is not over when it settles the intellectual question. The physical, social, and moral development of the young person should form a part of the scheme. To render this possible, schools must be more than lesson-mills. The one-session plan does not offer the widest field of usefulness, for under it a school can be little more than a place to come to recite. Study, recitation, manual training, and genuine hard play, even for secondary schools, should each have a place in the daily program. This is impossible when a school assembles at 8:30 and closes at 1. Of course the recitations can be heard and some study accomplished within that time, but the day cannot be a fully rounded one, or such as the young people have a right to claim.

Athletics should come as a rest from study, hence its place in school alternating with study and recitation. To get the best results, athletic work demands numbers; otherwise it fails from pure inanition. As proof one has only to call to mind his own futile attempts to take systematic exercise alone. When it becomes a part of regular school work under intelligent supervision, numbers and wholesome rivalry render it both interesting and healthful.

The same arguments to a certain extent hold in manual training. We are gregarious by nature, and we do with greater zeal and without conscious exertion the thing that someone else is doing at the same time. This is not a place to exploit manual training; its desirability has been passed upon by competent judges, and schools throughout the country are putting it in as rapidly as equipment can be furnished. To be able to work with one's hands is no longer considered a curse, but an accomplishment, and neither boy nor girl has attained full individual development until he knows the joy that dwells in skilful fingers.

Although to this all-around development the financial side presents difficulties, still tradition is largely in evidence. Because schools have been reasonably successful under a certain plan, that plan is considered adequate. Large classes, with the full time of teachers occupied in recitations, has too often been the standard. Economy in school administration has meant reducing the force until the largest possible number in the fewest possible classes can be heard by the fewest possible teachers. The determining factor has often

been the number of seats that can be crowded into a room, or the number of pupils who can be induced to get along without any regular seat. This may result in the saving of a few dollars of public money, and gain for someone a reputation for great executive ability, but it is not conducive to the highest development of the individual.

Each recitation teacher should have certain periods free for consultation with pupils, and for such individual work as may seem desirable. All possible pressure should be brought to bear to reduce classes. Of course, a teacher can manage thirty-five or forty in a class, allowing them to get what they can out of a general presentation of the subject; but until the class is small enough so that each mind can be felt each day, the work is not right. When this is possible, and only then, can the teacher reach individual needs.

Besides this, there should be someone whose sole business it is to have a personal acquaintance with individual students. The plan of most high schools is that of an assembly-room in charge of a strong teacher, who is expected not only to maintain order in the room, but to keep the records, doing all clerical work for a hundred, two hundred, or more students, to examine every case of absence, to hold the school to habits of punctuality, and, besides all this, to hear classes most of the time. What can be expected in attention to individuals as long as this state exists?

Every school should have one or more assembly-rooms, according to the size of the school, in which no recitations shall be heard. Over that room shall be placed the biggest man or woman within the power of the school to obtain. Such a teacher, in order to keep in close sympathy with the vital workings of the school, should have one or two classes each day—never more than two—and should be allowed to take these to a recitation-room, putting the next best teacher in the study-room for the time. Just keeping order is the simplest of all things that a good session-room teacher does, and when a school is rightly in hand, that phase of it can be safely delegated for a short time. But the arrangement should always be considered temporary, and the hand of the permanent teacher should never be lifted. Under these conditions it is possible for the teacher to have some real knowledge of the young people in charge. He can learn something of their ambitions, something of the trend of each mind, can test its moral fiber, find the failing and apply the remedy. In the study-

room he will discover the weak spots in the teaching force, and be in a position to advise teachers to the correction of those faults, or to speak with authority as to their final usefulness to the school.

There should be a system of reports from each teacher on the character of work done by each pupil. That does not mean that a formal standing should be given, but at least once a week a report of all those whose work has been unsatisfactory should be in the hands of the study-room teacher. His business is to look into the cause of the failure and readjust program or student as may be necessary.

Again, wide opportunity for usefulness is offered in watching habits of study and in correcting bad ones. He will soon find that he is expected to answer questions in Latin, Greek, mathematics, physics, history, and all other branches of the curriculum. He may not be an authority on all these, but his knowledge of methods of study should enable him to put the student on the right track for solving the difficulty for himself. Hours of hard labor and possible utter discouragement can often be saved by a wise answering of an intelligent question at the time. Do not understand that it is the business of this teacher to answer every question or to do the work for the student; that is comparatively an easy task; but he should give such judicious guiding or intelligent questioning as shall put the pupil in the way of doing the thing himself. A school should learn to look upon such a teacher as "a very present help in trouble;" as a friend, not a task-master; as one whose highest mission is to serve, not to command. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be the servant of you all; and whosoever will be the chief among you, let him be your minister."

This study-room teacher should also determine whether the school is working good or ill to the individual student. It sometimes becomes his duty to decide whether the best development of boy or girl requires him to remain in school or to leave it. Many a loafer has been made by keeping a boy at his books when his heart was elsewhere. If he is determined to go to work, if he is naturally industrious, and scholarly pursuits do not appeal to him, if the school cannot reach him, then the highest duty to this young person is to take side with him even against the cherished wish of parents.

The same attitude should be taken toward college. A degree is not all-important, and often trying for it will result only in mediocre

work and in the possible shutting one out from some other field of real usefulness.

These and a thousand other problems, varying according to the number under his care, will occupy the mind and heart of every faithful teacher.

In the public schools, large numbers, insufficient teaching force, the demands of living up to a system, the tangle of red-tape, and countless other external conditions present difficulties and demand the expenditure of much energy in overcoming resistance; yet even there much has been accomplished in attention to the individual. School laws may be inadequate, school boards degenerate into political machines, superintendents be but the tool of designing men, principals be but figure heads; yet between all this and the interests of the young people stands a solid phalanx, the rank and file of faithful teachers. Let conditions be as unfavorable as they may, let salaries be inadequate, let tenure of position be utterly uncertain, yet the majority of teachers work on in unflinching devotion to a problem which they understand in their hearts, but may not be able to formulate.

After all has been said, the final solution of the question rests with the individual teacher. You may plan courses of study; you may demand college degrees, or insist upon special work in pedagogy; you may set up all kinds of artificial standards; yet in the end everything depends upon the personality of the teacher. What that is lies beyond the power of any pen to define. From experience all appreciate what it means; all recognize its force when coming in contact with it. The man or woman possessed of the right kind of personality must have more than intellectual attainments, more than an interest in teaching history or some other subject; must be intensely human; must keep ever the spirit of youth, though locks be gray; must have quick sympathy both with joy and sorrow; and, above all, must believe in young people. That does not imply a blind, maudling, sentimental faith—nothing could be worse than that—but a faith that sees both good and bad, tells the truth about it, and is able, while being as severe as need be, to show back of all a genuine human love. That teacher must be master of himself, of the situation, of the individual; must be patient, alert, quick of judgment, interested, honest, happy, and untiring in service. The demands are heavy, but the reward is great.